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Church Music and the New Leisure

IT is commonly recognized that music is or can be the church's most potent means of arousing and sustaining the religious attitude, and of giving full expression to the whole congregation's deepest and most inspiring feelings and thoughts as it looks toward God. Not so common is the lesser but still great realization that the church, with its music leader, organ and usually one or more pianos, its auditorium and smaller rooms that can be used for music, its weekly and great holiday occasions for communal expression, and its "socials" and other week-day opportunities, is potentially the greatest single factor for the development of musical expression and enjoyment among adults.

We do well to offer opportunity for community singing at a school building or other center in the evening, but in the churches at eleven o'clock on Sunday morning there are probably more men and women gathered to sing together, presumably, as well as to take part in other ways of worship, than could be attracted to a whole week of "sings" in all the school buildings or other centers. True, only hymns and chants are sung in the churches, but to large numbers of the people gathered there, and to many who do not go to church, no other kind of musical expression by them can be more fully enjoyable and recreative than the singing of a great hymn. In no other expression of any sort can the ordinary person attain a fuller joy, liberation and renewal of the best that is in him. In many churches, however, the congregational singing is apparently so feeble in spirit, in the choice of hymns as

well as in the performance of them, that there is not only waste of a great opportunity, but also a kind of insincerity.

We do well also to offer good choral performances in concert halls, and to strive as hard as is often necessary to attract an adequate audience to them, but in many a church there is an adequate audience every Sunday, and there is or should be a chorus—a choir—which, though not to give a concert, should sing all the more beautifully because it is addressing its musical offering to God on behalf of the audience. Given some of the best suitable music, much of which is simple, even the least talented choir of people who can carry a tune can, under proper leadership, learn to sing extremely well. It was a member of the great Bethlehem Bach Choir of individually untrained singers who said, "I wouldn't go across the street to hear any one of us sing alone, but when we sing together I'd go a thousand miles to listen." In many instances, however, the singing of the church choir is much inferior to that of the secular chorus, whose audience may be so small as to dishearten its members. It hardly need be said that most of the best choral music in the world is religious, having grown out of the church's own services and literature; and that it occupies a larger place than does any other music on the programs, taken as a whole, of so-called secular choruses.

Furthermore, many a worthy chorus and orchestra is almost constantly being harassed or threatened by the cost of its upkeep, one item of which is the rental of a rehearsal room; and it may suffer also from a feeling of being apart from what are regarded as the really important currents of life in the community. If the church could afford to grant without cost to such a chorus, orchestra or other musical group the use of a rehearsal room once a week, it would, in addition to freeing the members of that much of the group's financial burden, be heartening them with the moral support im-

plied in the church's generosity. The church might, even more importantly, offer opportunity for the people of its own parish to start new musical groups to meet in its rooms on week-days. This could be of especially great value to the young people graduated from high school musical organizations.

CONGREGATIONAL SINGING

The singing of the congregation may be made more vital, inspiring and otherwise true to its purposes through such conditions and ways as the following:

1. Real, active interest in its possibilities on the part of the minister and of the organist and choirmaster.

2. Cooperation between the minister and the organist in seeing to it that the congregation has an appreciative understanding of the true place of congregational singing in the church service. A talk on the subject by the minister could be very helpful.

3. A wise choice of hymns, taking into account not only the Scripture readings or the sermon for the day, and whether or not the congregation is familiar with the hymns, but considering also the value of contrasts in feeling. In addition to hymns of penitence and personal entreaty, which seem now to be most commonly chosen, we need words and music that turn our thoughts away from self to love, praise, thanksgiving and to the majesty, wonder and beauty of God. And we need to realize these feelings and attributes through really expressing them, not singing all hymns and all the phrases of each hymn alike, as is very commonly done.

4. Placing the hymns in keys suited to the congregation. The usual four-part arrangement of hymns often forces the melody, which is all that can be expected of the congregation as a whole, too high for many people. That arrangement is especially suited to the choir; but as the authority and eminent composer, Vaughan Williams, has said, "The choir have their opportunity else-

where, but in the hymn they must give way to the congregation, and it is a great mistake to suppose that the result will be inartistic. A large body of voices singing together makes a distinctly artistic effect, though that of each individual voice might be the opposite." Of course, the difficulty would be obviated if the congregation could sing in parts, though we would then feel the need to seat all the people of each part together. But under the actual conditions, we would better encourage only unison singing in the congregation, inviting those who can and wish very much to sing a lower part to join the choir or to form a sort of auxiliary choir of people who will sit together as such amidst the congregation, blending their voices with those of the latter.

5. Good playing of the hymns, with allowance for the proper "breathing-places" in each hymn, and with a feeling for the meaning of the words and for the live, undulating flow of the melody to and from its climactic points. In other words, the hymn should be really "sung" on the organ, not played as though it were an instrumental exercise. It is at least partly because of the lack of this real vitality and meaningfulness in much of the playing of hymns that in many a church the people or the minister or both have wanted the hymns "pepped up" (artifically vitalized), and the organist has then played them faster and sometimes with as much as the hymn could possibly allow of the spirit of the college cheer-leader or of the dance orchestra leader. Or jingly tunes with juvenile words have been used. A trumped-up or trivial animation and loudness have been mistaken for the deep, abiding enthusiasm of fine, simple hymns played and sung in accordance with what they really are. Rhythm, on which the vitality of a hymn chiefly depends, must be achieved on the organ through the carrying flow of its phrases, to which we have already referred, not through anything like the percussive effects and the accents of piano-play-

ing. It is quite possible to give the effect of animation even in the slowest hymn by feeling and expressing that pulsating flow or progression of the rhythm. Only rarely, for the sake of making an unusually emphatic climax, is it good to detach a chord as is so commonly done on the piano; and even then the pedals should continue giving their deep, unbroken foundation to the whole phrase.

The organist should study also to discover how loudly he should play a certain hymn or a phrase of it and with what combination of stops in order to evoke the best congregational singing of it. He should not, of course, indulge in any violent or very subtle changes in volume or tempo, or in affectation of any sort. The general character and mood of the hymn should have great influence upon him; and the size of the audience should help somewhat to determine his choice of tempo, a large body of people naturally moving somewhat more slowly than a small one. Though the good, lighter and faster-moving hymns should also have a place, congregational singing by any number of people is at its best in hymns that are broad and massive. Whatever else the organist believes he can be sure that it is not necessary to play a hymn in a stiff clock-like manner. The congregation will follow him or soon learn to do so if he will play with a natural and sincere freedom and fullness of spirit, especially if he plays the hymn through in that manner before it is sung.

A clear understanding should be had by the choir as to the point in the introductory playing-over of a hymn at which the members are to rise promptly together. And their rising should be the signal for the congregation to do likewise. The late, irregular, and apparently indifferent rising of people to sing a hymn is a sad handicap.

While considering the effect of such behavior on the inner attitudes of the people, let us consider even more earnestly the effects of organ preludes, interludes

and postludes on the character of the whole service. These probably have the greatest possible influence in this regard, and they should be carefully chosen to establish or maintain the best possible attitude for the time, never departing from reverence and excellence. They should also be such as to be integrated in the service as a whole, not a planless series of pieces.

6. Antiphonal singing now and then between the congregation and the choir, or between the men and the women, or between other portions of the congregation. For example, the choir might sing the first verse alone in unison or in harmony, followed by the congregation alone in the second verse, then the choir alone, and so on until the last stanza, in which all should join. The reader will readily think of a variety of other possibilities. The cumulative effect of having one section or group after another come into the singing can be an especially good one. The singing of one or more stanzas without accompaniment is still another one. In any antiphonal singing care must be taken to choose a distribution that under the circumstances can be carried on with proper feeling, dignity and ease. By no means should every hymn in a service be divided up so; but one hymn that is especially well suited thereto might be selected for such treatment, which should be regarded as a special way of worship, not at all as a stunt. The distribution of the verses could be announced with the hymn number, or the text of the hymn might be printed in the program of the service with plain indications as to the singing of each verse.

7. The use of descants. The congregation, aided perhaps by the men of the choir, sing the tune of the hymn while some or all of the treble voices of the choir sing a descant (an independent tune written especially to soar above the familiar tune). This is most interesting and effective when it is done in only one, or at the most, two verses, after the first, of a four-versed hymn; and the descant must always be a good deal softer than the familiar tune. It is like a halo over the

tune, and so the congregation should naturally feel urged to provide a fine, full body of tone for it. A good descant can add a rare beauty as well as variety to the hymn-singing. A Faux-Bourdon can be even more interesting, being in a sense a combination of three added tunes all going on while the congregation and the tenors of the choir sing the tune. What it really amounts to, however, is a new harmonization of the tune with a descant at the top. There are several examples of the Faux-Bourdon in the superb *English Hymnal* and in the equally fine *Songs of Praise,* both published by the Oxford University Press, and there are many more in *The Tenor Tune Book,* published by the Faith Press of England. *A Book of Descants* by Alan Gray is published by the Cambridge University Press, *A Collection of Faux-Bourdons and Descants* by A. Riley is published by Mowbray, and *The Descant Hymn-Tune Books* (two of them) arranged by Geoffrey Shaw are published by Novello. The latter books are especially useful, each containing over thirty well-known hymns with descants. Each of these publishers is in England, but the first two and the fourth books mentioned can be gotten through Carl Fischer, Inc., Cooper Square, New York, and the last through the H. W. Gray Company of 159 East 48th Street, New York. These companies and the E. C. Schirmer Music Company of Boston can supply also single copies of descants and faux-bourdons. It being possible to learn a simple descant by rote, there may be no necessity for buying many copies. The edition with voice parts only of *The Descant Hymn-Tune Books,* costs only eight pence for each volume. The organist may be able to compose good descants.

8. Hymn recitals to gain greater appreciation of familiar hymns and acquaintance with unfamiliar ones. In place of, or as a part of, some of the brief organ recitals given just before a church service, or of any other church organ recital, there might be the singing of a fine, varied program of hymns by the choir—a hymn

recital for which the choir has prepared with as much care and zeal as they would for a fine anthem. Even if only one or two of the best hymns were to be sung so, the event could be of much value as well as interest. The printed program of the service or else the hymn boards would announce the hymns, so that members of the congregation could be seeing them in the books while they listen. Another occasion for such a recital, though very brief, would be in the church service itself, when upon announcement of an unfamiliar hymn, the choir would be asked to sing the first one or two stanzas alone. The possible value in any means of getting people to learn more hymns becomes very apparent when it is realized that few people are familiar with more than fifty hymns though even so completely excellent a collection as the Oxford *Songs of Praise* contains over four hundred. But the most effective means for doing this is the special hymn practice by the congregation.

9. Congregational hymn "sings" in which the usual ritual of the church service is omitted for the time being and definite visible leadership is given to the singing of familiar hymns and the learning of additional ones. A half-hour for this before or after a Sunday evening service has been found the best time, and even where there are no services on Sunday evenings that time of the week is likely to bring the most people. However, such a practice of hymns can be so potent in enhancing the meaning and power of the congregation's worship that, if necessary in order to reach many people, about fifteen minutes of the period for the Sunday morning service might be taken for it once a month, or the people may be willing to come for it before the usual service time or remain after the latter. The most effective time for this morning practice would be before the service, especially if the hymns used in it were to be those chosen for the service itself. But if no time on Sunday is well suited to it, the practice should be

offered on some week-day evening. A union musical service, say, on a Sunday afternoon or evening, or a Wednesday evening, joined in by the congregations of a number of churches can be a most inspiring practice which is at the same time a real festival, even if no rehearsing has been done for it. The choirs of the churches might join also, but not necessarily.

Along with the choice of the hymns themselves, the most important factors in a hymn practice are, of course, the inner attitude and the methods of the leader. He must feel free, informal and full of the joy of singing and yet be deeply earnest and reverent. His greatest force will come from a full insight into, and love of, the hymn he is leading (for which he should have prepared himself thoroughly), and a sincere appreciation of the musical and religious potentialities in an interested group of people confronted by a fine hymn. His main purpose will be to have people realize how greatly and with what fine feelings, quality and happiness they can sing together; so the loud, trumped-up sort of excitement known as "pep" will not interest him. The origin and interesting stories or other circumstances associated with a hymn or with hymn-singing in general are often worth telling in order to develop greater understanding and love of it. Each of the following books can be helpful in this regard:

One Hundred and One Hymn Stories, and *More Hymn Stories* by Carl F. Price, Abingdon Press, New York

Hymnody of the Christian Church, by Louis F. Benson, Doubleday, Doran and Company, New York

Hymn-Tunes and Their Story, by J. T. Lightwood, Epworth Press, London, England

The Evolution of the English Hymn, by F. J. Gillman, Macmillan, New York

But the most important things to do are to reveal the

meaning of the hymn itself and of its most significant words and phrases, and to have it sung accordingly and with freedom of voice and spirit, full flow of rhythm, proper phrasing, precision (no slurring), good enunciation, as well as accuracy. Chief of all aims is to get people really to give themselves to the singing, generously, deeply and self-forgetfully; and good posture in standing or sitting is one influence in this direction. Mental and spiritual alertness go naturally with physical alertness. Another good influence is the keeping of sustained tones vibrantly alive with meaning and full flow of breath. In comparison, the way such tones, especially those at cadences, are usually allowed by a congregation to "peter out" is like a feeble hand-shake compared with the sustained grasp of hand that is the natural token of real enthusiasm. A few such feebly held or quickly dying tones must be enough to enfeeble the whole singing. But any improvement in the singing should be attained as far as possible through the meaning and inspiration of the words and music themselves rather than through the ordinary sort of teaching or rehearsing. Most effective of all will be the actual example given by the leader or by the choir of how a given phrase or tone can be sung with full satisfaction.

The doxology and the Psalms, Glorias, and other chants might well be included in any ample time given to congregational practice of singing.

10. Hymn Festivals. Every church service should enkindle in some measure the glow of spirit that is the essence of a festival. Any union musical service uniting the people of several churches in the singing of hymns can be especially effective in this regard. But most inspiring of all can a hymn festival be for which a number of good hymns have beforehand been practiced or at least made familiar in the various churches. The hymns should be all of the best, of the sort within which, though simple, there is ample room for growth

in spirit, in expressiveness and in beauty; and they should be sung in unison. They might be chosen from one or more hymn books of which sufficient copies can be made available at the church or public auditorium in which the festival is to take place. A large number of hymns are common to all the most-used hymn-books. But a leaflet of hymns especially chosen for such use may be better. Fortunately, the Department of Church and Choral Music of Northwestern Univeristy has published a superb little collection of 77 hymns and carols, entitled *Selected Hymns and Carols,* which can be purchased at the following rates (transportation included): 1 to 25 copies at 20 cents each; 26 to 99 copies at 15 cents each; and per hundred, $12.50. A great achievement it would be if a copy of this leaflet were in the home of every church member. One object of the festival should be to make known some of the best hymns in the hymn-books, because in many churches these are seldom or never sung.

The festival should be marked by variety, though not too much, in the choice of the hymns and also in the mode of performing them. Antiphonal singing, the use of descants, and other ways discussed in sections 6 and 7, above, of adding variety and beauty to the service, should be used. A picked choir or each of the choirs might be asked to prepare well one verse of each hymn in four-part harmony.

A well-balanced orchestra might be formed of the best players from each Sunday school or church orchestra, to play the accompaniments and, possibly, a suitable instrumental prelude or interlude or both. For the formation of this orchestra, each choirmatser or special music leader could be asked to submit a list giving the total number of players of each instrument in his church or Sunday school orchestra, and the number who could and wish to play in the festival orchestra, remembering that the latter will have to rehearse several times before the festival. Then a quota could be

determined upon for each of the contributing orchestras. This project might lead to the establishment of a permanent good civic orchestra without, we hope, weakening the church orchestras from which the players come.

From about twelve to twenty hymns would be sung in such a festival. But almost as great an inspiration and lasting benefit to congregational singing could be gained through only four or five hymns sung by the entire audience at a choir festival such as is planned in detail in a leaflet entitled *A Festival of Choirs,* published by the National Recreation Association at five cents a copy. The hymns might be the following:

"When Morning Gilds the Skies," to the tune, Laudes Domini

"Fairest Lord Jesus," Crusaders' Hymn

"The Spacious Firmament on High," Creation

"A Mighty Fortress is Our God," Ein Feste Burg

"Saviour, Again to Thy Dear Name We Raise," to Toulon, known also as Old 124th.

This program, it will be seen, provides for a variety of fine feelings reaching a majestic climax with Ein Feste Burg, and then bringing a closing benediction with the quiet but strong Toulon. The singing of these hymns at the festival could readily and interestingly be prepared for in each church, even if only through having each one sung at some of the regular church services. The listing of them in connection with announcements of the coming festival, in church bulletins and bulletin boards, in the newspapers, and possibly in the bulletins of Parent-Teacher Associations, Women's Clubs, Civic Clubs, the Chamber of Commerce and other similar groups, would help to arouse eager anticipation of the general singing of them at the festival. The words of them would, of course, appear in the program or, if no programs are printed, on a stereopticon screen.

THE CHOIR

The improvement of choir singing is a subject needing greater attention than can be given it in this bulletin. The following booklets are very helpful:

The Festival Booklets

No. 1 *Church Choirs* by H. Walford Davies—1 shilling

No. 2 *Mixed, Female and Male Voice Choirs* by Hugh S. Roberton—2 s.

No. 9 *Boys' Choirs* by Sydney H. Nicholson—1 s.

Published by Paterson Sons and Co., Ltd., London. Obtainable from Carl Fischer, Inc., Cooper Square, New York. (Publications priced at a shilling usually cost 50 cents in the United States.)

Another very helpful book is entitled *The Art of A Cappella Singing* by John Smallman and E. H. Wilcox, published by the Oliver Ditson Company, 359 Boylston Street, Boston, at $2.00 a copy. It deals with problems of the individual voice, choral technique, repertoire, interpretation, and so is often applicable to accompanied as well as to a cappella singing.

An excellent and everlastingly usable collection of one hundred anthems has been published by the Oxford University Press in *The Church Anthem Book* edited by Sir Walford Davies and Dr. Henry G. Ley, at $2.50 a copy. Many of the anthems are simple enough, though of the highest excellence, for the least advanced choir to undertake and grow on.

Let us here say but three things about the choir. First, the choir's singing, being supposedly an act of worship, an offering to God, and an influence in disposing the congregation to worship, should be as fine as it can possibly be. The music should be excellent and within the reach of the singers' powers, and they

should rehearse more often than is customary among choruses. As Dr. H. Walford Davies has said, "Nothing good is attained unless it becomes a 'hobby,' a persistent pursuit. Can singers not meet in small groups at each others' houses during the week? . . . It seems worth ceaseless practice during the week in order to sing even one Amen or Response perfectly on the following Sunday."

Secondly, if it is a good and deeply satisfying thing for an individual to be able to give himself to such a "hobby" as singing in a choir, if it is a good thing for the church to enlist as many of its members as possible in actual participation in its endeavors, and if this is a good thing also for the character, morale and general happiness of the community, then an important object of the choir should be to give opportunity to as many people as it properly can to devote themselves to singing in it, gradually growing in quality and skill to the high point possible under good leadership. Fortunate are the churches who have a music leader, a "minister of music," whose happy consecration to his opportunities and whose other qualities and skills have brought about the development not only of a good senior choir enlisting many volunteers, but also of two or three junior choirs of various ages. It should be remembered, however, that while such developments depend very largely on the choirmaster, the ideal organization of a choir is one in which there is a good leader for each vocal part, an excellent singer who can unobtrusively do much to bring even the least capable of the singers into confidence and harmonious efficiency.

Thirdly, we wish to call attention again to the National Recreation Association bulletin entitled *A Festival of Choirs,* in which full details are given for bringing about a festival that can be of great lasting value as well as immediate inspiration to each choir taking part in it, and to the community as a whole.

Note: The Church Music Society of England has published several illuminating pamphlets obtainable at ten cents each through Carl Fischer, Inc., Cooper Square, New York. Among them are:

Music in Village Churches
Music in Larger Country and in Smaller Town Churches
Music in Church Parishes: A Plea for the Simple Hints on Hymn Tunes
Hymn Festivals and Hymn Practices
The Singing of the Psalms and Canticles to Anglican Chants
Points of View (12 cents)

Other very valuable publications are:

Church Music by Sir W. H. Hadow, Longmans, Green & Co., London and New York
Church Music by Sydney H. Nicholson, The Faith Press, England
Musical Ministries in the Church by Waldo Selden Pratt, G. Schirmer, Inc., New York.

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